

VZCZCXRO3043  
RR RUEHDBU  
DE RUEHNT #0751/01 1330943  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 131024Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0887  
INFO CIS COLLECTIVE  
NATO EU COLLECTIVE  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0076  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0255  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0247  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0209  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 000751

SIPDIS  
DEPT FOR INL ANDREW BUHLER AND EXBS JEFF HARTSHORN  
ANKARA FOR DEA CHRIS MELINK  
USOSCE FOR ELIZABETH KAUFMAN  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/05/13  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KTIP](#) [SOCI](#) [EAGR](#) [KISL](#) [ASEC](#) [KG](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: AGRICULTURE, BORDERS, AND ISLAM IN THE FERGHANA VALLEY

REF: TASHKENT 375

CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy P. Buckley, Second Secretary, Department of State, Political and Economic Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Poloff visited the Ferghana Valley on May 5-6, traveling through Fergana and Andijon Provinces en route to Kyrgyzstan. The overland trip was a good opportunity to take the pulse of this unique and populous area of the country. The land border crossing with Kyrgyzstan between Andijon and Osh was strictly controlled but with brisk pedestrian traffic. There were armed guards near the Kyrgyz border but life seemed to be very normal for local inhabitants. An imam in Fergana City also shared his thoughts about the new U.S. administration and issues important to Muslims in the Ferghana Valley. Anti-trafficking in persons awareness signs were prominently displayed in government facilities and on the roads. At least on this visit, there was no evidence of public discontent. End summary.

Bridge is Out

-----

¶2. (C) Poloff traveled overland to the Ferghana Valley on May 5 on a six-hour journey to Osh, Kyrgyzstan. Road conditions in the Kamchik Pass were considerably better than on poloff's last visit in March (reftel). Once in the broad plain of the valley, poloff traveled due east on the main highway toward Andijon until reaching a canal where a bridge was under reconstruction. There were no signs warning motorists that the bridge was out, let alone indications of a detour. A dirt track led to another crossing point, but that bridge was also out of commission. Locals helped put the vehicle back on an alternate route, and this presented an opportunity to talk with rural farmers. Interestingly, several interlocutors aged 11 to 30 spoke no Russian whatsoever. Cotton was planted late this year, they reported, due to the uncharacteristically heavy spring rains, but they were still

optimistic about a decent harvest and seemed very at ease. Poloff asked an 11-year old Uzbek boy why he was not in school on a weekday morning, and he replied "no, I go to the bazaar." For the next hour in the rural backroads of Fergana Province poloff then noticed dozens of school-age children playing and riding bicycles. It was not until reaching the metropolitan area of Andijon that poloff confirmed that schools were indeed open.

#### TIP Awareness

-----

13. (U) As was reported elsewhere in the country, the Ferghana Valley was full of anti-trafficking in persons billboards. They are in virtually every population center - poloff saw them in Kokand, Fergana City, Asaka, and Andijon - as well as in small villages. Thus, the traveler encounters virtually dozens of notifications on the journey from Tashkent to the Kyrgyz border. Even railroad control stations and guard booths protecting infrastructure such as bridges were displaying anti-TIP materials for passing cars to see. Inside the border checkpoint, the passport control area was also bristling with anti-TIP materials, and poloff counted seven signs about the issue, including on the glass of the passport booth itself and a listing of hotline numbers around the country. (Note: This is more evidence of the Government of Uzbekistan's aggressive and widespread public awareness campaign. A digital photo example of one billboard will be sent to G/TIP and the desk. End note.)

TASHKENT 00000751 002 OF 004

#### Dostlik Border Zone

-----

14. (C) Following recent reports in the Kyrgyz media about tensions amid border disputes, including an alleged incursion of armed Uzbek officers in the village of Chek, poloff paid close attention to the border area. In the outskirts of Andijon City, already a sensitive part of Uzbekistan after the 2005 incidents there, there were more vehicle checkpoints than is typical and plainclothes officers usually attended each one along with the omnipresent traffic police. Another vehicle checkpoint is located about three kilometers from the border, and the buffer zone between this outer checkpoint to the border is densely populated. Poloff observed four Uzbek border guards armed with machine guns at various points along this stretch of road, including one standing guard where a small fence separated a Kyrgyz grazing field from a cluster of houses on the Uzbek side. This looked to be normal in this zone, however, and residents went about their business or were out enjoying the nice spring weather.

#### To Kyrgyzstan and Back

-----

15. (C) At the Dostlik border checkpoint itself, numerous taxi drivers clustered outside the main gate but the Embassy vehicle was the only car passing through at midday; however, a steady stream of pedestrians were entering passport control on foot. A plainclothes officer, presumably from the National Security Service, glowered at poloff and followed him through the facility; the Uzbek official also freely accessed the border guards' compartment and studied the computer screen. A line started to form as the officials - as usual - made phone calls reporting poloff's presence and transcribed previous entries and exits recorded in the passport. Almost all of the pedestrians were speaking Uzbek, but most were

Kyrgyz citizens. Interestingly, the Kyrgyz citizens were more vocal in complaining about the delay to the officials. The Kyrgyz side was much easier, and Kyrgyz citizens merely waved their passports and kept walking. A few farmers were pushing large pushcarts heaped with leafy produce across the border, and there appeared to be only minimal inspections of the goods as they labored across.

16. (C) Returning on May 6 from Osh to the same border checkpoint, poloff was impressed that the Kyrgyz officer came to the car window with a stamp, joked with us, and sent us across to the Uzbek side in less than one minute. The Uzbek formalities then consumed 29 minutes. This time, about 15 people were already clustered in front of the passport control booth, and all appeared to be Uzbek speakers with Kyrgyz passports. One lady was pleading with the border guard "I have to get in, you must let me in today..." but apparently to no avail. Poloff noticed that several people waiting around him had pages full of identical passport stamps from this crossing. A man in line next to poloff confirmed that he was an ethnic Uzbek from Osh who travels to Andijon almost weekly to buy cheaper produce which he then sells in the bazaars in Osh. (Note: It seemed that the hassle of the border crossings and the transport costs would negate any profit margin, but most of the people seemed

TASHKENT 00000751 003 OF 004

to be doing similar shuttle shopping trips. End note.)

17. (C) Poloff spoke with a good-natured Customs officer after finally being spotted in the cluster of locals and quickly ushered through the gate while they processed the passport. He indicated that relations with Kyrgyz counterparts were normal and there were no indications of heightened tensions. Poloff also asked about precautions against swine flu. He was aware of reports this virus was spreading rapidly but he said no measures were put in place yet at this border and there were no instructions to wear masks or assess travelers' health.

Too Much Rain

-----

18. (U) The Fergana City bazaar was ablaze with color as the first waves of fresh produce were on display. Shoppers were in a good mood after looking forward to the first strawberries, cherries, and green onions of the season. One fellow browser complained that the berries are not tasty this year due to the heavy rains. A vendor confirmed that the strawberry harvest was disappointingly small because many were lost as a result of the rains, and he was not optimistic that higher prices from increased demand would offset the losses. Other than the bazaar, the only large gathering poloff saw was a crowd watching a traveling circus perform an acrobatic routine in a village center.

Visit to Yangi-Chek Mosque

-----

19. (C) Poloff met with Imam Abduvali Khafizov at the Yangi-Chek Mosque in Fergana City, who was happy to receive an official American guest without any diplomatic note. Workers were busy painting an ornate decorative ceiling under a balcony, improvements which Khafizov said was a community service project. He reported that up to 200 Muslims in the community worship at the mosque on a typical day, and many more on Fridays. He said his mosque was one

of 200 in Fergana Province alone, and there were 200 others in Namangan and Andijon Provinces, respectively, for a total of about 600 in the Fergana Valley. This was a substantial increase over Soviet times, he said, and he was satisfied that the Government of Uzbekistan allowed for this expanded freedom to worship. Imam Khafizov also praised the U.S. for nominating him for a "Muslims in America" international Visitor Program in 2002, which helped him appreciate how many Muslims are in the U.S., and he continues to share this goodwill with his congregation. He suggested holding additional versions of the same program for other imams. (Note: This is an excellent example of how valuable the IVP is, as it influenced a Muslim leader in a conservative part of Central Asia and open doors for sustained contact with him over several years. Unfortunately, it has since been very difficult for imams to obtain permission to participate in such programs. End note.)

¶10. (C) Imam Khafizov said he and his community welcomed the new U.S. administration and hoped that President Obama will strive for peace. Khafizov clarified that he did not think President Bush was

TASHKENT 00000751 004 OF 004

a bad person, but the end result of his policies was counterproductive. "We are simple people from a poor country, and we just want to see other people live in peace," he stated, adding that "I am also sad that the U.S. lost so much money on wars in which innocent civilians die from bomb attacks." Nonetheless, Imam Khafizov does not believe his followers are anti-American and he preaches to them about peace. Rather, he said, they are more concerned about basic economic issues and making ends meet. For example, he discussed a local controversy in which poor squatters built some illegal dwelling units which were torn down by the hokim's (governor) office because they blocked a fire lane for emergency vehicles. He sympathized with both sides, noting that the government does have a responsibility to ensure safety but that communication should have been better. He is less preoccupied with larger political issues, although he had no kind words for Muslim extremists and Christian missionaries alike, accusing both groups of trying to undermine established society.

Comment:

-----

¶11. (C) The populous Ferghana Valley remains strictly controlled by suspicious Uzbek officials, yet life seems to go on as normal. Uzbeks have a tremendous reservoir of patience, be it waiting for passport stamps, stopping for traffic fines, or dealing with less than optimal growing conditions, and during this snapshot in time, at least, everything seemed ordinary with no signs of discontent.  
NORLAND